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The Weather

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THE PALIMPSEST

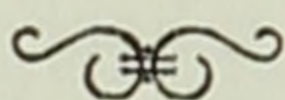
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The Weather

Iowa weather was freakish during 1950. January was the first month since June, 1949, to record above normal precipitation generally throughout the state. An eight-inch snow, coupled with sleet, hampered Iowa travel on January 25. Intense cold followed almost all over the state; Decorah reported 31° below zero on the 27th. The summer was the coolest on record; in fact, the entire year was unusually cool, except for October which was the fourth warmest October in Iowa weather history.

The moisture pattern was also markedly irregular. As a result of a long dry spell in the fall and early winter of 1949, many sections early in 1950 were reporting a deficiency of moisture for farm crops. Many wells went dry, streams were low, and farmers were forced either to drill deep wells or to haul water for their cattle. The Geological Survey in February noted that the streamflow in the interior of Iowa was below the normal for the tenth consecutive month. Denison was one of

many Iowa towns that feared a water shortage early in January. The much-needed rains did not reach Iowa in considerable amounts until April.

Iowa was faced with a coal shortage in the first months of 1950 — a shortage that was most severe in eastern Iowa where the dealers depended heavily upon mines affected by strikes and shut-downs. Keokuk, with only a two-day supply of coal on hand, asked the aid of Rodney Q. Selby on January 24 to meet the serious shortage. Many public schools were closed in February for lack of fuel, and many towns — including Cedar Rapids, Anamosa, and Iowa City — were forced to ration coal. At Iowa City, the University offered to share part of its supply of coal with the community. On March 3, Sheriff Albert J. Murphy reported that a ton of coal had been stolen from a Johnson County rural school. A 25 per cent reduction in power consumption was ordered in several communities. In order to keep the plant in operation for a week, the employees of one industrial concern in Davenport sawed wood over the weekend. As a result of the fuel shortage many homeowners put in oil or gas heating, particularly in the Keokuk and Burlington communities.

On April 9 an Easter Sunday ice storm struck eastern Iowa: Clinton and Clinton County were most severely hit, and for a time Clinton's only link with the outside world was by short wave radio. Governor Beardsley, in response to an ap-

peal for help from the paralyzed city, ordered national guard troops into the area. Units from Dubuque, Davenport, and Cedar Rapids — numbering over 200 men — were sent to assist in cleaning up after the storm. Northwestern Bell Telephone Company reported that 133 towns in eastern Iowa were without phone service, and estimated that 4,600 telephones were out of order, 1,400 in Clinton alone. Clinton's hospitals and the police radio operated with auxiliary power. Literally thousands of trees were broken and toppled, but little crop damage was reported due to the late spring. Early estimates placed the Clinton losses at over a million dollars.

The following month, on May 5, Iowa was battered by an intense windstorm, the "outstanding weather event of the year." Winds of gale and hurricane force, gusts of which reached 90 miles an hour, caused extensive damage, injured twenty-two people, and killed three, one of whom was a schoolboy. At Pella, nine metal grain bins were torn from their moorings and careened through yards and streets; one finally struck a house. The FM tower atop the engineering building at Iowa City was ripped from its base, falling across the street and striking a parked car. The industrial arts building at Woodside School, north of Des Moines, was destroyed. Perhaps with a political motive, the "Welcome Truman" sign was blown down at Ottumwa, three days before the arrival of

the President. Many Iowa insurance companies reported that loss claims for damages would exceed anything experienced in their histories. One company, operating mainly in rural areas, received over 44,000 claims totaling over three million dollars. A conservative estimate of the damage was placed at five million dollars.

Spring was late in coming to Iowa. By the end of March there was very little indication of field activities, although a few farmers were sowing oats. April, which was even colder than March, was the most "backward" spring month over the state since April, 1920. In addition, the dry weather pattern continued to retard the growth of all vegetation, so that by the end of April the seeding of oats was not completed. Cool, wet conditions during the first half of May caused many farmers to despair of planting all their acreage. The cool and wet pattern continued into June — the fourth consecutive month of below normal temperature in Iowa — and the crop growth remained behind schedule. By the end of June normally 50 per cent of the corn is "laid by," but this year only 10 to 15 per cent of the crop had received its final cultivation. July was the fourth coolest July of record, with lower averages recorded only in 1882, 1891, and 1915. It was also the fifth consecutive month with temperatures averaging below normal. The corn crop was ten days to two weeks late. There were very few days with Iowa's usual 90-

degree temperature; many nights were unseasonably cool. The stay-at-home folks could send a card to vacationing friends and truthfully say, "Slept under blankets last night." The weather bureau termed July "as pleasantly cool," which was a delightful contrast to July 25, 1936, when the mercury boiled to 117 degrees.

August, with an average temperature of 67.7 degrees, was the third coolest August since 1873, when the keeping of Iowa weather records was started on a statewide basis. However, the cool weather which retarded the corn crop also delayed the second-brood corn borers so much that they never did materialize. By the end of August, when normally one-half of the corn crop should be well dented and hard, only 23 per cent was in the process of denting and it was anticipated that only two-thirds of the crop had prospects of maturing without frost damage. A low temperature of 30 degrees, which was first recorded at Elkader on August 30, 1893, and later at Mason City in 1915, was equaled on August 20, 1950, at Britt and Sibley.

Frost made its appearance in Iowa in September, but the damage to the corn crop was mainly local. However, warm weather in October — the fourth warmest in 78 years — was welcomed by the farmers. The October tests for corn moisture conducted by the Weather Division of the Iowa Department of Agriculture revealed that the 1950

Iowa corn crop averaged 36 per cent in moisture content — the second highest on record — exceeded only in October, 1945, when the corn tested 40 per cent. In Des Moines the temperature jumped 14 degrees within 5 minutes on October 16 — rising from 73 to 87 degrees. On October 30 Keokuk reported a record-breaking 92, while a state high of 94 was recorded at Iowa City on the 18th.

The average temperature in Iowa for 1950 was 46.0 degrees, 2.6 below the normal average for the state. The total precipitation of 29.12 inches was 2.25 below normal for the year.

Mark Twain once said that "Everybody talks about the weather but nobody does anything about it." When bad weather grounded two speakers scheduled to appear on the program of the Monument Builders of Iowa convention, the committee decided to call upon someone traditionally blamed for the weather. As a result, James D. McQuigg, who is in charge of forecasting services in Des Moines, was the substitute speaker for the occasion.

KENNETH F. MILLSAP